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LETTERS.

SECRET SOPHISTRY

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Having written for *The Nation* when Carey McWilliams was editor, I was until recently of the opinion that it was a rational journal open to new ideas. What changed my mind was the rather disturbed exercise in name-calling in which Aaron Latham (and Bob Woodward) indulged under the pretense of reviewing my book, *Secret Agenda* ["Mixed Nuts," Feb. 2].

Surely it must have been obvious to the editors that Latham's tirade was motivated by malice (and, I suspect, by sycophancy) rather than by a genuine interest in evaluating new evidence in the Watergate affair.

In his attack, Latham indiscriminately compares my book to books advocating conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination. The relevance of that comparison is obscure, however, unless he means to suggest that Watergate was *not* a conspiracy, in which case his revisionism is far more extensive than my own.

Further, when Latham implies that *Secret Agenda* is without documentation, he deliberately ignores upward of 1,000 footnotes, the testimony of more than a hundred sources and nearly 10,000 pages of formerly secret F.B.I. documents which even the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was not permitted to see. The importance of that new information has been acknowledged by *The New York Times* and other publications; by pretending it does not exist, Latham does a disservice to *The Nation's* readers.

Elsewhere, Latham complains that James McCord's former employee Lou Russell is dead and so cannot confirm the story I have told. While it is true that Russell has passed on to his reward, he was hardly the only witness to the events I have described. For example, with respect to call girls at the Columbia Plaza Apartments and Democrats at the Watergate, liaison between the two was established not by Russell but by former Washington attorney Phillip Bailey, who is alive and kicking and quoted in my book.

Two things are most obvious in Latham's review: the hatred that he and Bob Woodward feel toward me and the sophistry on which they need to rely in their effort to condemn *Secret Agenda*. This is not entirely a surprise. Woodward is a careerist whose ambitions are hopelessly entangled in the accepted version of the Watergate affair. It seems to me that *Nation* readers should have been told that Woodward's remarks were less than unbiased; among other things, *Secret Agenda* embarrasses Woodward by citing errors in his reportage. This embarrassment is compounded by quotations from an internal C.I.A. memorandum in which one of Woodward's principal sources, Robert Bennett, himself an agent of the C.I.A., brags of "feeding" stories to Woodward in

an effort to steer him away from leads implicating the agency in the Watergate affair. The memo tells us that Woodward was "suitably grateful" for Bennett's help.

But what facts in my book do Woodward and Latham claim are incorrect? None. The only matter with which they appear to take factual issue concerns a statement about Woodward's Naval career. And it is here that the sophistry of these two becomes most apparent. According to Latham, "Hougan quotes a source who says Woodward 'was in Naval intelligence.'"

"But . . . 'I wasn't in Naval intelligence,' Woodward says. 'It just isn't so.'"

The reader, then, is left to conclude that I have relied on an anonymous source to make Woodward's Naval career seem more intriguing than it was. In fact, however, nothing could be further from the truth: Woodward and Latham are being disingenuous. It is they, not I, who prefer that my source should remain anonymous. As *Secret Agenda* states, it was Roger Farquahar, the first newspaper editor to give Woodward a permanent job, who expressed the opinion that Woodward had been in Naval intelligence. Farquahar told me that he based this opinion on his recollection of Woodward's resumé and on Woodward's obvious access to intelligence information. . . . Nowhere do I state that Woodward was in Naval intelligence. Rather, I make it clear that Woodward, in his capacity as a communications officer and, subsequently, as part of an elite briefing unit, was given access to intelligence information of the greatest sensitivity. Does Woodward deny that? Or does he merely wish to obscure the fact by insisting, irrelevantly, that he was not attached to the Office of Naval Intelligence per se? My suspicion is that he would prefer to obscure the issue rather than to clarify it. But if his intention is to deny that he had extraordinary access to military secrets, he would do well first to discuss the matter with his former colleagues at the Pentagon—many of whom I interviewed.

Jim Hougan